DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 403 948 JC 970 111

TITLE	Metropolitan Community Colleges, Exploring America's Communities. Progress Report.
INSTITUTION	Metropolitan Community Colleges of Kansas City, Mo.
SPONS AGENCY	American Association of Community Colleges, Washington, DC.; National Endowment for the Humanities (NFAH), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	Jan 97
NOTE	6p.; In: National Conference on American Pluralism and Identity Program Book (New Orleans, LA, January 18-19, 1997); see JC 970 087.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*American Studies; *Community Colleges; *Cultural Pluralism; Discussion; *Humanities; Multicultural Education; Program Descriptions; Two Year Colleges; *United States History; *United States Literature
IDENTIFIERS	Metropolitan Community Colleges MO

ABSTRACT

In 1996, the Metropolitan Community Colleges (Missouri) participated in the American Association of Community Colleges' Exploring America's Communities project, which works to strengthen the teaching and learning of American history, literature, and culture at U.S. community colleges. The colleges' team formulated a humanities course exploring the "American experience" to address a perceived lack of coursework dealing with American pluralism and identity. Since the team felt that the Midwest represented a microcosm of the larger issue, the course attempted to narrow its scope by focusing on diversity in the Midwest. The faculty selected a core history text that addressed multicultural issues to use as a background for the course. The text was supplemented with literary texts from Native American, African American, Asian American, Hispanic, and European writers. The course was team taught by four instructors who attended each class; one instructor presented material while the others added their own commentary. The program's main obstacle was the campuses' own lack of diversity, and budgetary constraints have raised questions about the course's future. Throughout much of the course, the instructors focused on the differences among the various groups studied. However, in the last few weeks, they focused sharply on the commonalties. On the final, students responded to commonalties in a surprising and encouraging manner. (HAA)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 403 948

Metropolitan Community Colleges
Exploring America's Communities Progress Report

Metropolitan Community Colleges of Kansas City

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J. Gollattscheck

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

In: National Conference on American Pluralism and Identity Program Book
(New Orleans, LA, January 18-19, 1997)

JC 970 111

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

I. DESCRIPTION OF COLLEGE.The Metropolitan Community Colleges of Kansas City Missouri represents a four-campus system spread throughout the greater Kansas city area. The campuses include Blue Springs/Independence in the east, Longview in the south, Maple Woods in the north, and Penn Valley in the center of town. The current District was established in 1964. Overall the District serves almost 18,000 students, day and night, full-time and part-time. Each campus reflects demographics of its location, for students prefer to attend college near their home. Consequently, Penn Valley, located in the heart of Kansas City, attracts a much more diverse student population than do the other campuses, although Longview, due to the shifting demographics of the south Kansas City area, is beginning to serve a more diverse student population. Blue Springs/Independence and Maple Woods' student bodies are 96 to 98% white. Almost two-thirds of the students are female and the average student age is 29 with the median age 24.

II. GOALS OF ACTION PLAN: Our team formulated the course Humanities 161: Exploring the American Experience to address a perceived lack of curriculum dealing with American pluralism and identity. While individual instructors had addressed diversity issues in their classes, our college had no institutional recognition of emerging diversity in the form of regular course offerings, and courses such

as Women's Literature and African-American Literature or African-American History were tied more into the field of study than into a general study of pluralism. Our course attempted to narrow its scope by focusing on pluralism in the Midwest. Since we felt that the Midwest and Kansas City itself represented a microcosm of the larger issue, since it was a diverse metropolitan community that featured pockets of ethnicity and urban development surrounded by rural areas. In short, we felt that the area reflected the American movement from agricultural to urbanized society and the movements of multicultural groups that accompanied it.

III. WHAT WE ACCOMPLISHED: Our faculty selected a core history text to address multiculturalism which we planned to use as a background for the course. After much thought, we chose Ronald Takaki's **A Different Mirror** and supplemented it with literary texts reflecting the groups we wished to address. For the Native American segment of the course, we chose Momaday's **The Way to Rainy Mountain**, at the suggestion of Lawana Trout. For the African American portion, we chose Hughes' **Not Without Laughter**; for the Asian American section, Kingston's **Woman Warrior**, and for the Hispanic portion, Cisneros' **Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories.**

We also felt that any course that dealt with the American multicultural experience in the Midwest could not overlook the contributions of European settlers, so we included a segment that featured Cather's **My Antonia** to present diversity among the white settlers also.

Our team consisted of four instructors, one from History, and the others from English, and each attended each class. One instructor

would present material and the others would punctuate the material with commentary involving the other members of the team and the class as well. Interruption was viewed not as rudeness but as spontaneous involvement, and the class never seemed confused as to which teacher was expert in which segment. Sharing the ideas of the instructors with the students was vital to our course's success.

IV. OBSTACLES: The obstacles to the course were expected. The campus where the course was taught was not especially diverse. The gender makeup reflected that of the District as a whole, but there were no African-Americans in the class, one Asian American and several Hispanic-Americans. Since the class pretty much reflected the makeup of students at that campus, we expected more difficulty than we actually experienced. All members of the team were white also, but we brought in guest speakers from other colleges who shared their experiences as members of the groups we studied and added a valuable dimension to our endeavor.

V. WHAT IS LEFT TO DO: The class was designed to be telecast after one semester of classroom presentation, and the team is still investigating how that can best be done. We fear that presenting the class as a telecourse on four campuses will compromise the spontaneity of the class as well as the interaction between teacher and teacher and teacher and student that we found so critical to the course's success. We probably will not be able to offer the course in its present form again due to budgetary constraints so we must find a solution to the dilemma.

VI. HOW WE ADDRESSED ISSUES OF DIVERSITY AND PLURALISM: Throughout much of the course, we focused on the differences among the various groups we studied, but in the last few weeks we focused sharply on the commonalities all groups shared. Our final exam was an in-class essay, open book, that addressed this very issue, and the responses were encouraging and, in some ways, surprising in terms of how the students saw the commonalities. One outstanding student showed how all Americans value family, safety, and freedom, an approach that showed that our students were assimilating material well and redefining the issues in creative ways.